

Whispering Smith

By Frank H. Spearman
Illustrations by Andre Boules

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CHAPTER XL.

Crawling Stone Wash.

When Whispering Smith and his companions were fairly started on the last day of their ride, it was toward a rift in the Mission range that the trail led them. Sinclair, with consummate cleverness, had rejoined his companions; but the attempt to get into the Cache, and his reckless ride into Medicine Bend, had reduced their chances of escape to a single outlet, and that they must find up Crawling Stone valley. The necessity of it was spelled in every move the pursued men had made for 24 hours. They were riding the pick of mountain horseflesh and covering their tracks by every device known to the high country. Behind them, made prudent by unusual danger, rode the best men the mountain division could muster for the final effort to bring them to account. The fast riding of the early week had

given way to the pace of caution. No trail sign was overlooked, no point of concealment directly approached, no hiding-place left unsearched.

The tension of a long day of this work was drawing to a close when the sun set and left the big wash in the shadow of the mountains. On the higher ground to the right, Kennedy and Scott were riding where they could command the gullies of the precipitous left bank of the river. High on the left bank itself, worming his way like a snake from point to point of concealment through the scanty brush of the mountain-side, crawled Wickwire, commanding the pockets in the right bank. Closer to the river on the right and following the trail itself over shale and rock and between scattered boulders, Whispering Smith, low on his horse's neck, rode slowly.

It was almost too dark to catch the slight discolorations where pebbles had been disturbed on a flat surface or the calk of a horseshoe had slipped on the uneven face of a ledge, and he had halted under an uplift to wait for Wickwire on the distant left to advance, when, half a mile below him, a horseman crossing the river rode slowly past a gap in the rocks and disappeared below the next bend. He was followed in a moment by a second rider and a third. Whispering Smith knew he had not been seen. He had flushed the game, and, wheeling his horse rode straight up the river bank to high ground, where he could circle around widely below them. They had slipped between his line and Wickwire's, and were doubling back, following the dry bed of the stream. It was impossible to recall Kennedy and Scott without giving an alarm, but by a quick detour he could at least hold the quarry back for 20 minutes with his rifle, and in that time Kennedy and Scott could come up.

Less than half an hour of daylight remained. If the outlaws could slip down the wash and out into the Crawling Stone valley they had every chance of getting away in the night; and if the third man should be Barney Rebstock, Whispering Smith knew that Sinclair thought only of escape. Smith alone, of their pursuers, could now intercept them, but a second hope remained: On the left, Wickwire was high enough to command every turn in the bed of the river. He might see them and could force them to cover with his rifle even at long range. Casting up the chances, Whispering Smith, riding faster over the uneven ground than anything but sheer recklessness would have prompted, hastened across the waste. His rifle lay in his hand, and he had pushed his horse to a run. A single fearful instant crowded now upon the long strain of the week. A savage fascination burned like a fever in his veins, and he meant that they should not get away. Taking chances that would have shamed him in cooler moments, he forced his horse at the end of the long ride to within 100 paces of the river, threw his lines, slipped like a lizard from the saddle, and, darting with incredible swiftness from rock to rock, gained the water's edge.

From up the long shadows of the wash there came the wall of an owl. From it he knew that Wickwire had seen them and was warning him, but he had anticipated the warning and stood below where the hunted men must ride. He strained his eyes over the waste of rock above. For one half-hour of daylight he would have sold, in that moment, ten years of his life. What could he do if they should be able to secrete themselves until dark between him and Wickwire? Gliding under cover of huge rocks up the dry watercourse, he reached a spot where the floods had scooped a long, hollow curve out of a soft ledge in the bank, leaving a stretch of smooth sand on the bed of the stream. At the upper point great boulders pushed out of the river. He could not inspect the curve from the spot he had gained without reckless exposure, but he must force the little daylight left to him. Climbing completely over the

lower point, he advanced cautiously, and from behind a sheltering spur stepped out upon an overhanging table of rock and looked across the river-bottom. Three men had halted on the sand within the curve. Two lay on their rifles under the upper point, 120 paces from Whispering Smith. The third man, Seagrue, less than 50 yards away, had got off his horse and was laying down his rifle, when the hoot-owl screeched again and he looked uneasily back. They had chosen for their halt a spot easily defended, and needed only darkness to make them safe, when Smith, stepping out into plain sight, threw forward his hand.

They heard his sharp call to pitch up, and the men under the point jumped. Seagrue had not yet taken his hand from his rifle. He threw it to his shoulder. As closely together as two fingers of the right hand can be struck twice in the palm of the left, two rifle-shots cracked across the wash. Two bullets passed so close in flight they might have struck. One cut the dusty hair from Smith's temple and slit the brim of his hat above his ear; the other struck Seagrue under the left eye, plowed through the roof of his mouth, and coming out below his ear, splintered the rock at his back.

The shock alone would have staggered a bullock, but Seagrue, laughing, came forward pumping his gun. Sinclair, at 120 yards, cut instantly into the fight, and the ball from his rifle creased the alkali that crusted Whispering Smith's unshaven cheek. As he fired he sprang to cover.

For Seagrue and Smith there was no cover; for one or both it was death in the open and Seagrue, with his rifle at his cheek, walked straight into it. Taking for a moment the fire of the three guns, Whispering Smith stood, a perfect target, outlined against the sky. They whipped the dust from his coat, tore the sleeve from his wrist and ripped the blouse collar from his neck; but he felt no bullet shock. He saw before him only the buckle of Seagrue's belt 40 paces away, and sent bullet after bullet at the gleam of brass between the sights. Both men were using high-pressure guns, and the deadly shocks of the slugs made Seagrue twitch and stagger. The man was dying as he walked. Smith's hand was racing with the lever, and had a cartridge jammed, the steel would have snapped like a match.

It was beyond human endurance to support the leaden death. The little square of brass between the sights wavered. Seagrue stumbled, doubled on his knees, and staggering plunged loosely forward on the sand. Whispering Smith threw his fire toward the bowlder behind which Sinclair and Barney Rebstock had disappeared.

Suddenly he realized that the bullets from the point were not coming his way. He was aware of a second rifle-duel above the bend. Wickwire, worm-



Seagrue Stumbled to the Sand.

ing his way down the stream, had uncovered Sinclair and young Rebstock from behind. A yell between the shots rang across the wash, and the cowering figure of a man ran out toward Whispering Smith with his hands high in the air, and pitched headlong on the ground. It was the skulker, Barney Rebstock, driven out by Wickwire's fire.

The shooting ceased. Silence fell upon the gloom of the dusk. Then came a calling between Smith and Wickwire, and a signaling of pistol-shots for their companions. Kennedy and Bob Scott dashed down toward the river bed on their horses. Seagrue lay on his face. Young Rebstock sat with his hands around his knees on the sand. Above him at some distance, Wickwire and Smith stood before a man who leaned against the sharp cheek of the bowlder at the point. In his hands his rifle was held across his lap just as he had dropped on his knee to fire. He had never moved after he was struck. His head, drooping a little, rested against the rock, and his hat lay on the sand; his heavy beard had sunk into his chest and he knelt in the shadow, asleep. Scott and Kennedy knew him. In the mountains there was no double for Murray Sinclair.

When he jumped behind the point to pick Whispering Smith off the ledge he had laid himself directly under Wickwire's fire across the wash. The first shot of the cowboy at 200 yards had passed, as he knelt, through both temples.

(To be Continued)

Mote, the second hand man, always has something cheap for you. Phone 260. North side of the square.

J. R. Underwood, one of the big farmers of North Homestead township, was a county seat visitor Saturday.

Knights of Columbus.

Great Bend council, K. C., which holds its meetings in Hoisington, put on its fourth class last Sunday in the presence of a large number of members. The 1st and 2nd degrees were exemplified by the Salina team, the 3rd degree by State Deputy Charles McCarthy and team from Kansas City. Some forty candidates were taken over the route. After the regular council work, all, together with their ladies, participated in an elegant banquet served by the ladies of the Hoisington congregation in the opera house. About two hundred were served. An excellent orchestra was in attendance, and a fine banquet was served by the ladies. Father Maher acted as toastmaster. Mayor Ed Heath represented the city of Hoisington, and Thomas Murphy of this city, extending the glad hand to the visitors on behalf of the local council. Several prominent members of the order made short speeches. A very pleasant evening was indulged in.

Those from Great Bend who attended the affair were Frank McFadden, John Murphy, Agnes Murphy, Charles Carroll, W. J. Murphy and W. P. Feder.

Dave Murphy and Joe Johnston, of Hoisington were visitors in the county seat Tuesday.

Mote, the second hand man, always has something cheap for you. Phone 260. North side of the square.

Some Potatoes.

Gus Wehrhahn brought back with him from his trip to San Luis Valley Colorado, some of the many products of that locality. Among them are Irish potatoes, as big, well, as both your fists, a turnip that weighed four and a half pounds and samples of wheat and oats. The wheat yielded fifty-two bushels to the acre while the oats yield was seventy-five bushels. The San Luis valley lands are the irrigated lands for which Messrs. Whitcomb & Wehrhahn are agents, and the products mentioned are on exhibition at their office. They will take pleasure in showing them to you.

Ed Whiteman was down from the north side Tuesday.

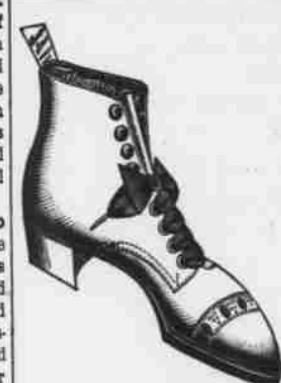
John Doherty, trustee of Lakin township, was in this city Saturday.

Mote, the second hand man, always has something cheap for you. Phone 260. North side of the square.

Henry Haberman of near Olmitz was in this city Monday on business.

Mr. Haberman has sold his farm, and in a few will months remove to St. Paul, Neosho Co. where he will locate.

Mayor T. C. Brown of Galatia, was down this week visiting around and transacting some business. Mr. Brown is feeling so good over the prospects of getting a railroad built into his town that he has gone to wearing a white collar. He says the prospects of the road are responsible.



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Notice of Publication.

First published in the Barton County Democrat January 28th, 1910

To Charles H. Howard, if alive, and if dead then to the unknown heirs, executors, administrators, trustees and assigns of the said Charles H. Howard.

You are hereby notified that you have been sued in the District Court of Barton County, Kansas, in an action therein pending in which Fred H. Ewing is plaintiff, and yourselves and others, Defendants, and that unless you answer the petition filed in said case, on or before the 11th day of March, 1910, the said petition will be taken as true and judgment will be rendered against you and each of you quieting the title to the North East Quarter of Section Two (2), Township Twenty (20), Range Fifteen (15), Barton County, Kansas in Plaintiff.

OSMOND & COLE,
Attorneys for Plaintiff.
S. M. KELLAM, Clerk of District Court.

Notice of Publication.

First published in the Barton County Democrat January 28th, 1910

To Edward W. Morgan if alive, and if dead, then to the unknown heirs, executors and administrators, trustees and assigns of the said Edward W. Morgan:

You are hereby notified that you have been sued in the District Court of Barton County, Kansas, in an action therein pending in which M. Dally is Plaintiff, and yourselves and others, Defendants, and that unless you answer the petition filed in said case on or before the 11th day of March, 1910, the said petition will be taken as true and judgment will be rendered against you and each of you, quieting the title of Lot 7, Block 112, City of Great Bend, Barton County, Kansas, in Plaintiff.

OSMOND & COLE,
Attorneys for Plaintiff.
S. M. KELLAM, Clerk of District Court.

Notice of Publication.

First published in the Barton County Democrat January 28th, 1910

In the District Court of Barton County, Kansas, Maggie Wade, Plaintiff, vs. Edward Wade, Defendant.

To the Defendant, Edward Wade: You are hereby notified that you have been sued by the Plaintiff in the above entitled court and cause, and that you must answer plaintiff's petition filed herein against you on or before the 10th day of March, 1910, or it will be taken as true against you, and a judgment of the following nature will be taken against you: annulling your marriage with the plaintiff in this action, and granting the said plaintiff a decree of divorce from you.

MAGGIE WADE,
By her attorneys, Clarke & Boyd.

First published in Barton County Democrat January 21, 1910

Publication Notice

The State of Kansas

to Charles E. Gibson and wife — Gibson, whose Christian name is to plaintiff unknown; Albert E. King and wife — King, whose Christian name is to plaintiff unknown; A. C. Wilcox and wife — Wilcox, whose Christian name is to plaintiff unknown; E. Heiker, trustee McKinley & Heiker Investment Company, if alive, and if dead, then to the unknown heirs, executors, administrators, devisees, successors in trust, trustees and assigns of each of said parties, Defendants: You and each of you are hereby notified that you have been sued in the District Court of Barton County, Kansas, in an action in which John H. Morgan is plaintiff and you and each of you are defendants, and that unless you answer the petition filed in said case on or before the 11th day of March, 1910 the same will be taken as true and judgment rendered, quieting the title in plaintiff in and to Lots one, two, three and four (1, 2, 3 and 4) Section eighteen (18), township seventeen (17) range thirteen (13) W. in Barton County, Kansas, as against each of you and barring each and all of you from asserting any interest in and to said real estate land, or any part thereof.

J. B. PROSE,
Attorney for Plaintiff.

S. M. KELLAM,
Clerk of the District Court.

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